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North Vietnam: Hanoi may release the names of more
Americans held captive. [REDACTED] (Page 1)

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NORTH VIETNAM: HANOI MAY TRY TO UNDERCUT CRITICISM OF ITS POLICIES TOWARD PRISONERS BY RELEASING THE NAMES OF MORE AMERICANS HELD CAPTIVE IN NORTH VIETNAM.

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[REDACTED] RECENTLY RECEIVED OBLIQUE CONFIRMATION FROM A NORTH VIETNAMESE OFFICIAL IN PARIS THAT THE NAMES OF 59 AMERICAN PRISONERS RELEASED BY PEACE ACTIVIST DAVID DELLINGER CAME "STRAIGHT FROM HANOI." THE OFFICIAL INSISTED THAT NORTH VIETNAM WILL "NEVER" SUPPLY NAMES OF PRISONERS DIRECTLY TO US GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES, BUT HE SAID THAT HE THOUGHT DELLINGER "WILL BE GETTING MORE NAMES."

HANOI HAS BEEN UNDER PRESSURE FROM NON-COMMUNIST QUARTERS TO LOOSEN ITS PRISONER POLICIES, AT LEAST TO THE EXTENT OF PROVIDING A FULL LIST OF NAMES AND ALLOWING REGULAR CORRESPONDENCE WITH RELATIVES. THE RECENT RELEASE OF THE 59 NAMES PROBABLY HAS INCREASED PRESSURE ON HANOI FOR A FULL ACCOUNTING OF THE AMERICANS IT NOW HOLDS.

MINDFUL OF THE POTENTIAL THE PRISONER ISSUE HAS FOR FOSTERING SENTIMENT AGAINST THE WAR IN THE UNITED STATES, THE COMMUNISTS MAY NOW WANT TO GIVE CRITICS OF AMERICAN POLICY AN EXAMPLE OF THEIR ALLEGED CONCERN FOR VICTIMS OF THE WAR. SUCH A MOVE MIGHT SEEM ESPECIALLY APPEALING TO THEM AT A TIME WHEN ALLEGED US ATROCITIES IN SOUTH VIETNAM ARE MAKING HEADLINES.

BEYOND THESE PROPAGANDA MOTIVES, NORTH VIETNAM CONSIDERS AMERICAN PRISONERS USEFUL BARGAINING CAPITAL THAT WILL NOT BE GIVEN UP EASILY OR SOON. THE COMMUNISTS GENERALLY HAVE INDICATED THAT THEY REGARD THE PRISONER ISSUE AS ESSENTIALLY A POSTWAR MATTER, WHICH THEY WILL NOT DISCUSS, MUCH LESS RESOLVE, BEFORE THE MAIN ISSUES OF THE WAR ARE SETTLED.

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EVEN AT THAT POINT, THE NORTH VIETNAMESE PROBABLY WOULD HOPE TO EXTRACT A PRICE FOR RETURNING AMERICANS CAPTURED DURING THE BOMBING YEARS. THERE IS STRONG EVIDENCE, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT THEY MIGHT TRY TO LINK THE PRISONERS WITH A DEMAND FOR REPARATIONS FOR DAMAGE CAUSED BY US AIR ATTACKS.

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